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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001314

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SUBJECT: INDIA VISIT EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS, NEPAL'S KING SAYS

REF: KATHMANDU 1216

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski, Reasons 1.5(b),(d)

1. (C) Summary. King Gyanendra's week-long visit to India in late June "exceeded his expectations," a businessman close to Nepal's monarch told the Ambassador July 3. In New Delhi the King received assurances of Indian support conditioned on the maintenance of Nepal's constitutional monarchy and multi-party system. Gyanendra pledged to protect both, and adduced his assent to the Nepali Prime Minister's request to dissolve Parliament as evidence of his commitment to the constitutional system. The King reportedly pressed Home Minister Advani to take more decisive action against Maoists operating in India and to share information on terrorists reportedly operating in Nepal. Third-country security assistance to Nepal was not an issue in the King's meetings, and in fact Defense Minister Fernandes extended an offer to help fill gaps in foreign assistance. Our interlocutor also reviewed meetings with opposition leader Sonia Gandhi and former PM Chandrasekhar. The King travels to China July 9-15. End Summary.

#### India Trip Exceeds Monarch's Expectations

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2. (C) Nepal's King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah reported that his June 23-28 visit to India "exceeded his expectations in virtually all respects," a Nepali businessman with extremely close ties to the monarch told Ambassador and DCM July 3. Prabhakar Rana (strongly protect) said the King had asked him the night before to relate to the Ambassador his assessment of his trip to India, his first foreign visit since his accession to the throne in June 2001. Echoing a Royal Palace press notice issued just before the King's departure for New Delhi, Rana labeled the themes of the visit as "continuation" and "consolidation" (Reftel). The King felt press coverage of the trip had been "generally good," Rana added.

#### India Conditions Support on Continuation of Democracy

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3. (C) In India the King used every opportunity to brief his interlocutors on both the security situation in Nepal and what Rana termed "the big political mess in Kathmandu." The Indians--including PM Vajpayee--made it clear that India would support any and all measures to deal with the insurgency as long as two elements remained: the constitutional monarchy and a multi-party system. Gyanendra replied that both he and his late brother King Birendra saw themselves as protectors of the constitutional system, and he offered assurances that the multi-party system was here to stay.

#### King Commits to Constitutional Role

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4. (C) PM Vajpayee reportedly asked the King during their private meeting why he had agreed to Nepal's Prime Minister Deuba's request to dissolve Parliament. Gyanendra replied that his role as constitutional monarch gave him no choice but to go along. The only alternative would be to change Nepal's political system. Rana did not know whether in India the King had addressed the possibility of his having to intervene politically should elections fail to take place in November, sparking a constitutional crisis. (Note: The DCM related to Rana the concerns of some Nepali politicians that if elections failed to take place and the King had to step in, forces in the palace would press for scrapping the multi-party system and restoring a Panchayat-style regime like that which ruled Nepal during 1960-1990. Rana admitted that some in the palace might hold such views, but insisted that those individuals do not have political standing. He was categorical that there was no possibility of abrogating the party system and going back to something else. End Note.)

5. (C) Vajpayee had agreed that Nepal's palace would maintain close relations with the PM's office in New Delhi, and expressed no opposition to the King also developing direct relations with the Indian Home Minister.

#### King Presses Home Minister Advani

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16. (C) In a meeting with Home Minister Advani, the King reiterated that Nepal was committed to opposing terrorists of any stripe, Rana told us. The King had been firm with Advani, telling him that India's policy on Nepal's Maoists would have to change, implicitly to one more forthright and decisive. The King also asked Advani why he had not consulted with the GON before making public statements claiming Islamic militant groups were operating in Nepal. When the King asked whether India had passed information about the groups to Kathmandu, Advani replied that thought so but would check. The King added that if India provides solid information about such activity, Nepal would take action. Advani expressed his agreement to maintaining direct links between his ministry and Nepal's Royal Palace.

#### Third-Country Security Aid to Nepal Not at Issue

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17. (C) Rana was not aware of India expressing concerns to the King about U.S. or other outside security assistance coming into Nepal. He knew of only one occasion when the recent London meeting on aid to Nepal was mentioned: the King's meeting with Defense Minister Fernandes. Fernandes had not expressed concern about third-country military assistance. On the contrary, he offered that India stood ready to fill gaps in needed security assistance to Nepal, including short-term shortfalls. The King and Fernandes had discussed Nepal's specific defense needs in some detail, Rana said. (Note: Rana indicated that in New Delhi the King had been briefed on the London conference by Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Joint Secretary Meera Shankar. Her briefing jibed with the one Rana heard from the British Charge in Kathmandu who had attended the meeting in London, Rana said. This was evidence, in Rana's view, that the MEA was being more open and cooperative with the GON than it had been in the past. End Note.)

#### Meeting with Opposition Leader

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18. (C) Opposition leader Sonia Gandhi stuck to personal matters in her meeting on Nepal's King, leaving substantive issues to her economic advisor and former Finance Minister Manmohan Singh. (Note: Manmohan Singh's appearance surprised the Nepalis, who had expected Gandhi's political advisor, Natwar Singh, to join her as their substantive interlocutor. End Note.) The King briefed the Congress Party leader on the security and domestic political situations in Nepal. Gandhi agreed that the King would keep up direct contact with the party through Manmohan Singh.

#### Chandrasekhar

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19. (C) Former PM Chandrasekhar--who has close ties to Nepal's former PM Girija Prasad Koirala--paid a call on King Gyanendra in New Delhi. The King anticipated that the leftist former PM would criticize the continued campaign against the Maoists, so he preempted the line of questioning by first asking how India could allow the Nepali Congress Party (NCP) to split. Chandrasekhar replied that he no longer has the influence with the NCP that he once had. The King pressed Chandrasekhar for help in marshalling assistance to counter Nepal's Maoists insurgency.

#### Next Stop: China

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110. (C) King Gyanendra, who departs for China for a six-day state visit July 9, said he expected his trip there to be less problematic than his India visit. The King had considered the trip to India "riskier" because of the possibility of domestic criticism, as many Nepalis harbor deep suspicions about their southern neighbor.

MALINOWSKI